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2 AWACS AIRCRAFT SENT TO BOLSTER SUDAN AFTER RAID

A REACTION AGAINST LIBYA

Reagan Approves the Dispatch in Response to a Request by Cairo and Khartoum

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 18 — The United States has dispatched two Awacs surveillance planes to Egypt to bolster air defenses in the Sudan against a repetition of Friday's air raid on the city of Omdurman, Administration officials said today.

They said the action was authorized by President Reagan after a joint request was received from the Egyptians and the Sudanese, who have a defense treaty.

The dispatch of the Awacs planes was carried out in secrecy. Neither State Department nor Defense Department spokesmen were permitted to comment on any aspect of the Sudanese situation.

One official said privately he believed that two of the electronic surveillance aircraft were involved initially and that they had taken off this morning from Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma. He said it was possible additional planes would be sent in coming days.

Five Killed in the Attack

American officials said intelligence information left no doubt that a Libyan Air Force plane, a TU-22 bomber based at an airfield in Kufra, Libya, had carried out the attack, which was apparently aimed at the main Sudanese radio station. The bombs missed the station and its transmitter but hit nearby buildings including one belonging to the station. Five people were killed in the attack, which went unchallenged by Sudanese air defenses. The plane, officials said, took off and landed at Kufra.

The Sudan's President, Gaafar al-Nimeiry, has also accused the Libyans of the raid and of providing assistance to an insurgent movement in southern areas of the country. Libya has been accused in the past of plotting against the Nimeiry Government, and American Awacs planes have been sent to the region twice in the last 13 months because of concern here over Libyan activities.

U.S. Aides Weigh Alternatives

The Libyans denied today that their plane had attacked Omdurman, according to their official press agency. The agency said that ambassadors from all African countries had been told that the Sudan had invented the charge in order to win Washington's support against the insurgents.

Because of Egyptian and Sudanese concern over the situation, officials of the State Department, the Pentagon and other agencies worked over the weekend on alternatives for helping the Egyptians and Sudan without a major American involvement in what is viewed here so far as a local harassment of the Sudanese by the Libyans.

Officials said that no decisions had been made yet on the Sudan's request for an airlift of antiaircraft defense weapons and other equipment to be used against incursions not only from Libya but from Ethiopia as well. Both of those countries have been charged by the Sudan with supplying aid to the southern insurgents.

The United States has been in touch with Egypt in recent days to coordinate moves. The two sides agree, officials said, that Egypt should take the lead in the Sudan, in view of its historical ties to the country that controls the Upper Nile and of the defense pact, which is directed largely against Libya.

Egypt said today that some military officers had been flown to Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, which is situated five miles southeast of Omdurman, to review the developments and see what should be done in the future.

The decision to send Awacs planes to the region was consistent with a pattern started in 1980 when Saudi Arabia asked for assistance to help protect its oil fields against Iranian air attack. The Iranians had threatened to bomb nations of the Persian Gulf region for giving support to Iraq in the war that had just begun.

After four Awacs planes were sent to Saudi Arabia for temporary duty, a decision was made to sell the Saudis five of the advanced electronics reconnaissance aircraft and, until delivery was possible later this decade, to keep the four there on loan, flown by American personnel but paid for by the Saudis.

In February 1983, after intelligence reports of a Libyan plan to bomb Khartoum and to try to foment an internal insurrection, the United States sent four other Awacs planes to Egypt at the same time as a carrier in the Mediterranean was diverted to international waters near Libya. No attack ever took place, and American officials credited the show of force with having deterred the Libyans. The Libyans denied they had planned any such action.

Last August, Libya, whose forces control the northern part of Chad, supported renewed attacks by rebel forces in Chad against the Government of President Hissen Habré. This aroused concern in the Sudan and Egypt as well as in Chad. Two surveillance planes were sent to Egypt and two to the Sudan during that crisis.

Awacs Can Guide Interceptors

The Awacs, whose full name is Airborne Warning and Control Systems, is a converted Boeing 707 bearing large radar disks on top of the cabin. In addition to keeping track of all planes in the vicinity, it can direct fighter jets to intercept enemy aircraft.

American officials reiterated today that the United States had no intention of intervening in the civil conflict in the Sudan, which has erupted anew after more than a decade of relative calm. The conflict involves the predominantly Moslem north, which runs the Government, against elements in the Christian and pagan south who seek independence or more autonomy.

The fighting reportedly was started last fall when President Nimeiry sought to impose Islamic law on the entire country and to weaken the political force of certain tribes in the south through the creation of new provinces intended to disperse their strength.